Canadian Progress and the Panama Canal

(E. B. C., in the "National Review," London.)

Unquestionably Canada and other parts of the Empire will profit greatly by the reductions in steaming distances which will follow the opening of the Panama Canal as a conduit of sea-borne commerce. The fact that British Columbia (and a part, at all events, of the territory beyond that province) will be brought into touch with both sides of the Atlantic is perhaps the most important, as far as the Empire is concerned, of the inevitable results of the construction of the canal. For Vancouver and all other ports in British Columbia there will be a reduction of 8,400 miles to New York, about 7,090 miles to Montreal, and 6,000 miles to Liverpool. The reduction to New Orleans will exceed that to New York. The sea-voyage from Yokohama to Montreal will be about 2,700 miles less; that from Sydney to Montreal at least 2,500 miles less, or 3,000 miles if the call at Tahiti be avoided.

All the British West Indies, no longer at the entrance to a maritime "cul de sac," will be brought thousands of miles nearer to Canada's Pacific Province. Generally speaking, the fact that the circumnavigation of the globe in the Northern Hemisphere (in which most of the "red circle" of the British Empire lies) will at last be possible means to Imperial commerce practically what the discovery of a practical "North-West Passage" would have meant. The United States becomes an island, and so does Canada.

Vancouver and the Grain Traffic

The people of British Columbia have not been slow to grasp the meaning for them of as drastic a revision of the world's maritime trade routes as that which was brought about by the building of the Suez Canal. The Vancouver Board of Trade has been securing information as to the prospects for exports of Canadian grain and other products to European markets from that magnificent port via the Panama Canal.

The Board reports that, in the matter of grain, future rates from points in Saskatchewan and Alberta, west of Moose Jaw to Vancouver, should approximate to 9 cents per bushel as compared with 14 cents per bushel now in force, and that ocean rates from Vancouver to Liverpool, via the Panama Canal, should not exceed 20s. per long ton, or 13 cents per bushel, or a total charge of 22 cents per bushel from the point of production to the consumer in Great Britain or the Continent. This compares with 25-26 cents per bushel, the present rate on grain from the Prairie Provinces during the season of open navigation and with a rate of 36-37 cents during the winter. Storage charges during winter on wheat amount to 5 cents per bushel or more when kept waiting for shipment. If shipped through Vancouver these charges would, it is hoped, disappear, as the port is open all the year round.

Ocean charges from Vancouver to Liverpool, via the Suez Canal or around Cape Horn (a distance of 15,000 miles), for the last three years have been from 25s. to 30s. per long ton. By Panama the distance would be brought down to less than 9,000 miles, and the added tonnage regularly making Vancouver a port of call, in addition to the tramp tonnage available, should reduce the water rates to the figure already mentioned. The completion to the coast by 1914 of the Grand Trunk Pacific, Canadian Northern, and the practically new main line of the Canadian Pacific Railway (double tracked, with gradients equal to and in places better than those on the prairies) will, it is stated, give the same rail rates westbound for the same distances as the present eastbound rates, and, by equalizing conditions, immensely improve the shipping prospects of the west coast. Delegates from the Vancouver Board of Trade are at present holding conferences at Calgary and other points to discuss what Western Canada should do to prepare for the opening of the canal.

A Forecast of the Future

It is obvious that the economic progress of British Columbia will be vastly accelerated by these changes. The following passage from an address before the Royal Colonial Institute, by Dr. F. B. Vrooman, perhaps the most far sighted student of the potentialities of Western Canada's development, is an admirable forecast:

"We can now consider Vancouver as an outlet towards Europe and the Atlantic coast for Alberta wheat. Even now, with the present excessive rates over the Rockies, wheat may be shipped in winter from Calgary to Liverpool more cheaply then by the all-rail route to St. John in New Brunswick. The winter rates to Liverpool are fourtenths of a cent per bushel in favor of Vancouver from Calgary. The eastern route is blocked by ice five months in the year. The British Columbia route is open twelve months in the year. The Panama Canal will give the decided advantage to Vancouver all the year round. From Calgary to the head of navigation on Lake Superior is 1,260 miles. From Calgary to Vancouver is 644 miles. It is now generally believed in the West by the shipping people that Vancouver will be the port for the wheat of Alberta and West Saskatchewan which is destined for Europe and the Southern States.

"New markets will be found on the Atlantic for British Columbia lumber and paper. This new large demand will increase the price. But the saving of freight is an enormous item. The present freight-rates from Vancouver to Liverpool are sixteen dollars per 1,000 feet. The canal will give British Columbia a rate of about eight dollars per 1,000 feet. This difference per 1,000 will add to the value of British Columbia timber destined for Europe. But it is for more reasons than this that British Columbia is destined to be a vast Imperial industrial workshop. While her agricultural and horticultural possibilities are far beyond what is generally supposed, British Columbia is in natural resources and raw materials of industry one of the richest areas on the globe. But above all she is rich in mechanical power—water-power and coal. These are about to be opened up and developed. Their development soon will be beyond computation, for, roughly speaking, there is not an investment in British Columbia today which will not be directly increased in value by the new canal; but also much indirectly by the impetus given to development. This one thing—this canal, costing nothing—will double, quadruple and quintuple values out there in a few brief years. With easier access will come new trade, and new demands will create new products, and soon the innumerable water-powers of British Columbia will start the wheels of a thousand new industries. The illimitable resources of the province will be opened up, developed, and utilized at home or shipped abroad. The value of every town lot and of every acre of land of the 395,000 square miles of the province will be greatly enhanced; town sites will be hewed out of the forests, and the forests themselves—every stick of wood of their 182,000,000 acres of forest and woodland—will be increased in value directly, by reason of cheaper shipping alone, to the extent of several dollars per 1,000 feet; and in the items of lumber and wood-pulp alone the Panama Canal will make as a free gift to British Columbia considerably more than the United States is spending on the whole canal.

"The mines of British Columbia, which have already produced over £70,000,000, will leap forward with renewed prosperity. Her fisheries, which have produced £21,000,000, will be more extensively developed and, let us hope, be made again a British asset—since they are now wholly in the hands of the Japanese, who not only send their earnings home to Japan but are criminally